

CALIFORNIA WILDLIFE HABITAT RELATIONSHIPS SYSTEM
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R042 Northern Alligator Lizard *Elgaria coerulea*
Family: Anguidae Order: Squamata Class: Reptilia

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

This common lizard is widespread in northwestern California, in the Coast Ranges south to Monterey Co. and in the Sierra Nevada south to the Kern River. Also known from parts of northeastern California, specifically ponderosa pine and sagebrush within the Great Basin in Modoc County. Its elevational range extends from sea level in the Coast Ranges to higher elevations in the Sierra Nevada where it occurs from 305 m (1000 ft) in the north to 3350 m (11,000 ft) in the south. Found in a variety of forested habitats and montane chaparral.

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: The food habits of this lizard are similar to those of the southern alligator lizard except that generally smaller food items are taken. Stebbins (1954) reported insects, spiders, millipedes, and snails among the food items taken.

Cover: Cover is provided by surface objects such as rocks, logs, dense vegetation, and human debris. Refuge may also be taken in crevices, rock fissures, and mammal burrows.

Reproduction: No information on specific habitat requirements for courtship and breeding. Live young are born without use of a nest.

Water: No information on water requirements of this lizard, but it occurs in more humid environments than the southern alligator lizard. This is one of the few common reptiles of the humid north coast.

Pattern: This lizard is most common at the margin of coniferous forest types and in montane chaparral.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Strictly diurnal, individuals from coastal regions may be active all year with only brief periods of winter inactivity. Lizards from inland localities undergo long periods of winter hibernation, sometimes with only a very brief period of summer and early fall activity, especially at high elevations.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Predictable seasonal movements have not been reported for this species in California. Some movement away from the normal area of activity is expected as individuals seek suitable localized hibernacula. In Washington, Vitt (1973) observed that lizards of this species became common and gregarious at

hibernation sites.

Home Range: Little information available. Individuals from a population in coastal Washington were observed by Vitt (1973) to disperse gradually during April and May an unspecified distance away from a winter den site and then return again during September and October.

Territory: No evidence for the territorial defense of resources has been reported.

Reproduction: Mating probably occurs from mid-April through early summer depending on local conditions. Live young are born in August and September (Stebbins 1954). Litter size is three to eight. Courtship apparently involves neck-biting, and copulation may last as long as 24 hours.

Niche: Racers, rattlesnakes, garter snakes, loggerhead shrikes, red-tailed hawks, and domestic cats have been reported as among the predators of alligator lizards. Competition with other lizards for food, space or other resources is probably minimized by the unique physiological tolerances of this species, which allow them to be active at different times and in different microhabitats than other lizards. Competition may be further reduced because of the large range of prey size available to alligator lizards.

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